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ART ON PAPER:

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CREATION AND PRESERVATION

An Exhibit at The Illinois State Museum

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UNIVERSITY OF ILLINOIS-URBANA



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Paper:

"A felted sheet of vegetable but sometimes mineral or synthetic fibers, laid down on a fine screen from a water suspension."



Paper was first invented by the Chinese approximately A.D.100. The shredded vegetable fiber was mashed and sieved to deposit a vegetable felt. When a weave was used as a pattern, a "wove" paper was produced. When a sieve of parallel strips was used, a "laid" paper resulted, translucent in a pattern of thick and thin parallel lines broken at intervals by right angle lines which supported the sieve. Wires, bent to form a design, monogram, or date, laid onto the sieve, produced a "water mark." The first watermark was a cross used on paper from Fabriano, Italy, in 1282. The making of the best quality papers has remained unchanged since its invention.

With the development of paper, the stamping of designs soon followed. The Chinese were using cast type 400 years before Guttenberg's "invention" of printing around 1450. Oriental paper was sized with soft rice paste which made it soft and absorbent and ideal for brushwork and woodblock printing. With the European artists' demand for a hard paper which could be used for pen lines, the Italian papermakers began to size paper with hard glue or gelatin. The Italians also developed machines to break down rags for fiber instead of doing it by hand. Papermaking reached Mexico around 1575 and was first practiced in North America at Philadelphia in 1690.

The "best" papers are usually those containing 100% rag fiber. The "rags" used today are the cuttings and scrap from new cloth. Papers made with wood-fiber pulps and combinations are neither as strong nor as permanent as the all-rag papers. Today even all-rag papers sometimes contain chemicals which make them more prone to earlier aging and destruction.

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PAINTING AND DRAWING ON PAPER

Watercolor: A soluble paint in which transparent pigments have been mixed with a gum as a binder. The term is generally applied to that method of painting with transparent water-soluble pigments in which the white of the paper creates the highlights.

Gouache (pronounced Gwāsh): A paint using the same pigments as in watercolor but with white added to make the paint opaque. In the United States "poster colors" (or "designer's colors") are the common form of gouache.

Chalk, Crayon, Pastel: Powdered pigment formed into sticks which are drawn across paper, leaving the pigment trapped in the open pores of the paper. Some form of spray fixative is applied to help the attachment.

Ink: A fluid of pigment, usually made of carbon or lampblack mixed with a binder and water, used for pen or brush drawing.

Collage: Relief designs and textures built up on a support by the attachment of other papers with glue.

Silver and Gold Point: Silver - or gold - tipped instruments which are pressed on a gesso-coated paper leaving a line of soft tonality and linear delicacy.

Monotype: A design painted on a plate of glass or metal and run through a press while the paint is still wet. The printed impression created is unique. It is basically a drawing with imprinted features.

PRINTING METHODS:

Intaglio (pronounced In-tal' yō): Any printing process or combination of processes which lifts ink deposited in openings in a metal plate.

Etching: Scratching through an acid-resistant ground on a metal plate and biting with acid those areas exposed. The plate is printed by rubbing ink into the surface, wiping away the excess, and then forcing the paper into the etched lines to receive the ink caught there.

Mezzotint: Engraving a tone in which the metal plate is roughened by means of a rocking tool that makes indentions and raises a "burr." The burr is scraped away where lighter tones are wanted. The plate is printed as is an etching.



Aquatint: Etching a tone by dusting the plate with powdered rosin; the plate is then heated causing the rosin to adhere to the plate in a grainy pattern. Different depths of acid bite creates a range of tones. The plate is printed as is an etching.

Drypoint: Incising a line directly into the plate with a sharp instrument. A drypoint is characterized by a softness of appearance while an etching has a sharper line.

Engraving: Incising lines into a metal plate or wood block using a graver (also known as a burin), a lozenge-shaped tool which cuts away the metal. The engraved image is printed as an etching.

Woodcut: (The earliest method of relief printing.) Drawing a design directly on a woodblock, and cutting away those areas not to be printed. Ink is then applied to the raised areas. When paper is applied to the surface under pressure, the design is transferred.

Wood Engraving: A variant of the woodcut in which end-grain wood is used, allowing for greater detail and texture without splintering of the wood.

Lithography: Drawing on a grained stone or zinc plate with ink or a greasy crayon. The surface is then prepared and moistened with water. Ink is accepted by the greasy areas and repelled by the moistened grain. Paper is placed over the image and pressure applied to transfer the image to the paper.

Silk Screen (Serigraphy): Making a design with stencils attached to silk. Ink passes through the open areas of the silk weave while those areas filled in or covered do not print. Silk-screen prints are characterized by a sharpness of outline.

Collograph: Printing relief in which the plate is built up by attachment of paper and other materials to the plate and then inked. The plate thus produced may at times be printed as an intaglio but is most often printed as a woodcut.

Cliché Verre: Making prints in which the design is incised through a dark coating on a glass plate and printed in the same manner as a photographic negative. Corot and Millet were two of its most famous practitioners.



CONSERVATION OF ART ON PAPER

Art on paper is attacked by a variety of things which threaten its existence. Paper is its own worst enemy since it contains materials which act against itself. Modern papers are most vulnerable to this type of problem. The artist or collector should be aware of the quality of the paper and its permanence when choosing a paper to work on or a work to collect.

Environmental factors speed the decay of paper. Air pollution is one which is especially difficult to deal with since it is all around us. Light is destructive not only to paper but also to the pigments used on it. Fluorescent light and direct sunlight are the most dangerous to paper. Heat also speeds up the destruction of paper. The practice of hanging art above a fireplace will effectively cook a work of art in a short span of years as will normal heating in a home if the art work is hung near vents or radiators. Excessive moisture encourages mold and fungus and also creates stains. Insects and vermin attack paper which contains organic materials.

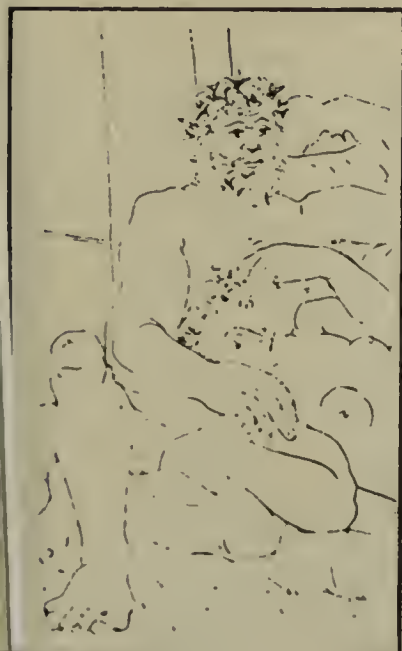
Possibly the worst sources of damage are the actions of man. The matting materials in common usage by framers contain acids which migrate to the art work and speed staining and discoloration. Under unfavorable conditions, the damage may show up in only a few years. (It is usually seen first as a brown stain around the mat opening.) Transparent tape and masking tape stain the art work and, since they hold the work rigid, may create dangerous tensions due to expansion and contractions of the paper caused by humidity and temperature changes. Most of these damages can be corrected by paper conservators, but the best conservation is the avoidance of having to repair.

To insure continued existence of art on paper, the following should be done. Make sure the work is on good quality paper. Have the work properly matted and framed with 100% rag board mounting and matting materials. Make sure it is attached to the mounting material with hinges of 100% rag paper and a soluble glue or with "print clips." Make sure the frame is sealed from the back to prevent dust and dirt from working its way in. Protect the work from excessive moisture and heat and keep it out of the direct rays of the sun and prolonged exposure to fluorescent light. Proper care costs a little more money and effort but will insure continued enjoyment of your work of art on paper.

The Museum will be glad to advise you on matters relating to the conservation and restoration of art works.

GLOSSARY OF COMMON PRINT TERMS:

- Artist's Proof:** A print for the artist's use created in addition to the usual edition. The term also means "print" on some late 19th or early 20th century reproductions to indicate a printed reproduction of an artist's work.
- State Proof:** A print that shows the development of an image on a plate or stone. For example, in a three-color etching the black plate is printed without the other two impressions to check the etch.
- Printer's Proof:** The print given by the artist to the printer for his personal use.
- "Bon a tirer":** A term handwritten on a print to show quality desired for the whole edition.
- 3/50:** Edition number meaning Number Three of Fifty. Not necessarily an indication that it is the third print produced.
- Re-strike:** A print made from an old or reworked plate at a different time by a different printer, usually being of inferior quality.
- Cancelled Plate:** The defacing of a plate with scratches, holes, or other means to prevent its reuse in its original state.
- Cancellation Proof:** A print made to show the defacing or partial destruction of the printing surface to insure that a print is not reprintable from that surface.
- Signed in the Plate, Signed in the Stone, etc.:** The artist's name printed within the image area of the print.
- Proof Before Letters:** Prints made before the "lettered" edition. In the past, reproductive prints were marked usually in the lower margins with the name of the engraver, the name of the artist he copied, the name of the publisher, etc. This was done last; prints made before this time were usually of better printing quality than the standard "lettered" edition.



WHAT IS AN "ORIGINAL PRINT"?

An "original print" refers to an original work of art; it is a term with a meaning unique to graphic arts. It is not a reproduction of another work in another media. Its idea may have started as a drawing or even a painting but it is not a photographic reproduction of that work, for it has evolved into a new statement of the artist's idea by the process of development into a print. A color reproduction done by photomechanical means is not an original print; the original is the painting in the collection of "So and So."

In an original print, the artist is both the designer and executant; he creates the master image on the printing material from which the prints are made. "Limiting" the prints made does not make an "original print"; it may increase the value, but it is the fact that the artist directly controls the process and is able to adjust for quality during the creation that is important. Artists have used photomechanical images in the creation of "original prints" usually in fragment.

The print collector must be the final judge of what he is collecting; an edition number, artist signature, or other statement written on the print is no assurance of its status or quality. Consultation with someone who has knowledge in prints will often save the novice collector money and embarrassment since it is often extremely difficult to establish the true stature of a print.

